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This study examines the role of arts programming in the public library setting. Qualitative interviews were conducted with four public librarians from North Carolina. The interviews focused on how public libraries value arts programming and its place in supporting the public library mission. Topics explored included collaboration, definition, evaluation, administrative and community support, presentation and the centrality of arts programs to the library's mission. The research presents a useful perspective on the uses and limitations of arts programs in the public library setting. Common patterns amongst all four libraries emerge over issues of centrality, presentation, collaboration, evaluation and definition.

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PUBLIC LIBRARY MISSION AND ARTS PROGRAMMING.

by  
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## Introduction

Arts programming in public libraries is available in a multitude of formats, on an impossibly immense number of subjects and with incredible variations in audience members. It runs the gamut from a film series to the use of the library as a gallery space to a lecture led by a specialist. Subject matter, presentation, targeted audiences and level of collaboration vary markedly. These activities are the subject of this paper.

With all these variation how does the library community define and think about arts programming in public libraries? The answer appears to be that the library community's thinking on arts programming is muddled and often unclear. My reading of the literature suggests there is a feeling within the profession and its published literature that arts programming is the "icing on the cake" and is of limited value, or its usefulness is primarily as a fundraising tool. A vocal minority of librarians and researchers on the other hand, supports arts programming as useful and necessary to fulfill a public library's primary mission to meet the information needs of its community. Other issues that surround arts programming in public libraries include methods of presentation, evaluation, and collaboration. It is striking to notice the conflicted thinking shown within recent research and writings among these topics as well.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the themes of presentation, selection, collaboration and the centrality of arts programming to the goals of the library. It will also address the lack of consensus about public libraries and their connection with arts programming in professional literature and research. First, the paper will examine many

of the relevant controversies and concerns of the profession through an in-depth literature review of recent and landmark works. To explore how the literature and “real-world” practices compliment or differ from each other I have chosen to conduct qualitative interviews, an interview type based on open-ended questions and the logic and methods by which an individual engages an issue in a real-world context. Finally, I will compare the experiences of the librarians interviewed and explore the general patterns they share.

## Literature Review

The literature review forms the backbone of a well-developed research study. It is not always a straightforward process; the depth and character of the professional literature shapes the review. I focused on standard databases, journals and a number of subject searches of the online catalogs at University of North Carolina, Duke University, and North Carolina Central University to find works appropriate for inclusion in the review. While there is an abundance of materials on programming or art collection in public libraries, for example, there is less available specifically on arts programming. Many subtopics within the general topics of arts programming in public libraries are at best discussed in the library literature not directly, but sideways. We must combine relevant works on these subtopics to build a complete picture.

In the literature we find educators, museum professionals, librarians, students and researchers, all with important perspectives adding to our thinking on arts programming. The writers are a mixed bag of influential leaders to lowly students. I found a number of European writers to be relevant. The writers contribute important additions to our picture of the theory and the real world of public libraries and arts programming.

Two studies, one American and the other British, have attempted to paint the current state of arts programming using surveys and statistics. The research studies form an important level of comparison with the qualitative interviews and should be examined carefully. Helle Berhndt (1981) and a former SILS student (Hayden, 1990) give evidence on art materials in public libraries. A batch of important works on general or adult

programming in public libraries provides important structure to current thinking by librarians. Opinion pieces by Susan Brandehoff (1997) and Nancy Milnor Smith (1997) flesh out the trends and controversies within the field on the purpose of arts programming within the public library setting. Evaluation of programs, presentation and collaboration are all issues important to provide context for the research data and observations. We will examine each of these items carefully in turn.

The American library Association Public Programs Office sponsored Cultural Programs for Adults in Public Libraries: A Survey Report (1999) by Dr. Debra Wilcox Johnson. The report is the most current and, in fact, the only study on cultural programs within the library field, and is therefore a landmark study. Over 1,200 public libraries across the United States responded to a survey focused on nine program types: book discussion, creative writing programs, author presentation/readings, reading incentive programs, lecture series, musical performances, dance performances, dramatic performances, and film series. While there is bias towards literary events in Dr. Johnson's survey, this is common with many of the other scholars under review. For our purposes this emphasis on literature means we must understand the context of the statistics in the Cultural Program Report; they had never been gathered before. Dr. Johnson (1999) makes clear the importance and limitations of her work:

Adult cultural programming has been a facet of adult services for several decades, yet no figures are available to compare previous practice with the findings of this study. The information presented provides a background for describing the value or rationale for adult programming and collaboration rather than an accurate picture of those efforts. The current study is important as a description of practice in the late 90s and as an exploration of the factors related to the provision of adult cultural programming. (p. 35)

What the study makes clear is the demand, and the expected increase in demand, for cultural programming in public libraries across the United States. “Nearly nine out of ten libraries offer some type of adult cultural programming (85.6%)” (p. iii), the most popular program being book discussions, with dance performances the least common. Surprisingly few libraries used cultural programs to target a user group. This stands out since the general literature frequently suggest that a common reason to provide cultural programs is to attract “non-library” users through a film series and dazzle them into checking out books.

On the issue of funding and support the report concludes that one out of every four libraries has a separate line item for adult programming as part of its budget. With 94.5% of all libraries providing some level of cultural programming as a component of adult programming, we can assume budget support is available in about one out of four libraries. For outside funding, the Friends of the Library groups are the main source. On issues of collaboration, Friends of the Library groups, art groups and historical societies are the most common partners, with the public libraries usually instigating collaboration.

Finally, the Cultural Program Report shows the library community almost evenly divided over the issue of the centrality of cultural programming to the library mission. The general literature reflects this divide and the finding confirms a common trend. “47.1% of surveyed libraries state cultural programs are central to a library’s mission with 45.1% in disagreement” (Johnson, 1999, p. v). A further breakdown of response shows that the opinion on centrality of a library staff directly determines practice. Those public libraries stating a strong belief in the centrality of cultural programming to the mission of the library also indicated a high level of involvement in cultural programming.

Low involvement was connected to a strong belief in the lack of centrality to the library mission for cultural programming. Involvement is characterized in the report as staff time and enthusiasm for arts programs, designated funds, and community response. The division of opinion within the library literature is a recurring theme. The Cultural Program Report findings are important measures of current thinking and involvement in cultural programs and a useful benchmark for comparisons.

Looking back twenty-six years an anti-programming position is detailed. D. W. Davies in Public Libraries as Culture and Social Centers: The Origin of the Concept analyzes the history of services and philosophies in both Great Britain and the United States for public libraries. Davies argues that the formative period for public libraries was between 1850 and 1900. There was a strong uplifting philosophy and tradition on both sides of the Atlantic in that time because public libraries were intended to be the “university of the common people.” Non-book programs were popular and seen as a way to bring in new users. The idea was if a person entered the library for a program or exhibit the librarians could convert them into readers. As Davies shows there is no reason to believe this premise and no statistics to prove it. He believes modern libraries following this uplifting philosophy are engaging in activities in areas where specialists better serve the public. His core objection to programs, a basic tenet of the platform for those against arts programming, is that the library loses the readers by focusing on programs.

It is possible that the public does not know what public libraries are intended to be since the tradition of ‘something for everyone’ is doomed to failure. The suggestion made here is that librarians take a new direction, that they become interested in and confine themselves to the concept of libraries as places for books and reading. By so doing they have little to lose other than those who are not interested in books anyway. What they gain is the friendship



and confidence of bookish people; and the respect which the modern world has for the specialist and the expert. (pp. 125-126)

British librarian Stuart Brewer offers a summary of a United Kingdom survey, the Heeks Report, in “Public Libraries and the Arts,” published in 1989 by the Library Association. Like the Cultural Programs Report, the Heeks Report documents important trends and thinking on the role of arts programming in public libraries. While the British library experience is different from the American experience, I believe there are enough similarities to make an examination of the report worthwhile. The Heeks Report is based on a two-year study proposed by the Libraries & Arts Working Party of the Library Association. A questionnaire was sent to all library authorities in the United Kingdom. The report also includes five yearlong case studies.

The idea of programming as a scheduled event using library resources and open to the public is firmly established. A constant problem in the literature is the incomplete and inconsistent definition of arts programs, and the “cultural programs” of the Cultural Programs Report is one example. The permeable nature of many art programs adds to the difficulty. Is graphic design a technology or an arts program? The definition of the arts in this survey is comprehensive, yet flexible; I subsequently adopted it for my interviews.

the term the arts includes, but is not limited to, music (instrumental and vocal), dance, drama, folk art, creative writing, architecture and allied fields, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic and craft arts, industrial design, costume and fashion design, motion pictures, television, radio, tape and sound recording, the arts related to the presentation, performance and exhibition of such major art forms and the study and application of the arts to the human environment. (Brewer, 1990, p. 79)

Beyond the useful definition, the Heeks Report offers much else. “Set in the context of a burgeoning of the arts, the Report challenges librarians and a range of organizations to take on a more positive role in encouraging and helping public libraries

to be actively involved with the arts in their areas.” (Brewer, 1990, p. 79). One of the themes of the study is the administrative nature of co-operation, the mechanism by which it operates, staffing issues and the hierarchy/structure within which they work. For example, the Heeks Report looked for policy statements dealing with the arts in public libraries and found a direct connection between the presence of a policy statement and vigorous engagement in arts programming and management. The LA (Library Association) describes itself as disappointed that the relationship between public libraries and Regional Arts Association is characterized as distant. It also felt that the public libraries potential role in arts promotion has not yet been fulfilled.

Other themes within the Heeks Report are international concerns throughout the library community. One such theme is the concern that public libraries need to concentrate on meeting the basic needs and that other, more specialized institutions should take on the responsibility for arts programming. What type of implication arts programming has on training and education of librarians is another still running controversy. Issues of access, marketing, special needs clients and impact of multiculturalism are other examples of debates associated with arts programming within the library community in general, not just in the United Kingdom. What we should take away from the Heeks Report, finally, is the emergence of a new perception within the United Kingdom that public libraries have a role in promoting, maintaining and offering access to art within their communities. We can see the Heeks supporters as librarians strongly in favor of and convinced of the centrality of arts programming to a public library’s mission.

A 1981 article from Art Libraries Journal, “The Use and Development of Art Materials in Large and Small Libraries” defends the use and incorporation of art materials into public libraries. Based on two lectures delivered by author Helle Behrndt the article argues that the primary reasons for not developing and circulating art materials can all be overcome. On the problem of housing, Behrndt argues libraries should provide an easy-to-store-and-handle prints collection. Collecting inexpensive prints and keeping such collections fairly small sidesteps major funding issues. It is worth noting that this was written at a time when libraries garnered more support, and before the boom in new technologies within the library setting. Behrndt also dispels the myth that handling art material collections includes extensive practical difficulties such as maintenance. She argues common sense and a reasonable knowledge of professional manuals or guidelines are all that is needed. In contrast to prevailing opinions, Behrndt believes the benefits of collecting and exhibiting art are large. People learn to see art objects as relevant and accessible, and the aloofness or distance commonly associated with art and museums can be dispelled. Her final point is to understand that the library should not try to behave or look like a museum, a principal concern of librarians. Behrndt believes the goal of the library should be to help make art part of everyday experience and that libraries are uniquely placed to help with that process.

For information on the types of art material available and the culture surrounding its use I turned to a previous SILS student’s thesis, Trends and Usage of Photographs, Paintings, Prints, Drawings, and Sculptures in North and South Carolina Public Libraries by Elizabeth Ellen Hayden (1990). Her survey-based research examines the number of materials owned and used, the ways the materials are used and opinions on the value of

photographs, paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture in forty public libraries in North and South Carolina. The regional match-up, focus on public libraries and relative currency made the study an appropriate source. Elizabeth Ellen Hayden's findings show that photography is the most popular medium collected and sculpture the least popular. The most popular use of the art materials has been for local history, arts programming is not an answer option on the survey and so is not documented. Importantly, the comments on the value of the art materials from the public libraries are almost uniformly negative. The majority of surveyed libraries do not see it as important to collect or use the materials. Maintenance and use of the existing collections as art objects is viewed as impractical. Finally, a high number of respondents see little use for the materials, and other areas of the collection, such as books, are thought of as more important. The Cultural Programs Report supports the conclusion that a majority of public libraries do not collect art objects. However, it finds that those who do actively collect have a high level of involvement in providing arts programs. Hayden concludes that the survey supports the idea that public librarians do not see a need to provide access to arts within their community and believe other specialized institutions, such as museums or universities, are better able to meet those needs.

The literature on programming in public libraries is very large and of varying quality. Library Programs: How to Select, Plan and Produce Them (1981) by John Robotham and Lydia LaFleur is representative of the type of guideline literature common to programming for public libraries. The authors believe programming brings people in that normally do not turn to the library. Programming is seen as an important method in helping to present information in a multitude of ways for different learning styles. They

also believe programs are a natural extension of the resources already available through the public library.

Robotham and LaFleur focus on three main functions: kinds of programming, finding and selecting programs and producing programs. The section on kinds of programs lays out format, best practices and how to target audiences for basic program types such as a film series or discussion group. There is a small subsection on the performing arts with a formulae approach for offering drama, poetry, music and dance performances with discussion of things like logistics for space, how to attract an appropriate audience and how to ask artists to be part of the program. The second section, finding and selecting a program, weighs heavily the importance of offering programs that are relevant and useful to the user community. This makes the knowledge and study of the user community a high priority. The final section focuses on the managerial functions and outside resources available for programming. Robotham and LaFleur escape some of the plodding character of many of the other manuals and present a complete and solid exploration of how to program in the public library setting.

Evaluating programming in public libraries is another theme that is supported by a review of the literature. W. Boyd Rayward (1985) analyzes the purpose of evaluation of programming. He argues that there are three attitudes to programming that affect evaluation. The first stance is that programming wastes a library's scarce resources and is a misunderstanding by the profession of what a community needs or wants from a library. The second stance is that programming has value primarily as a public relations function. The final attitude is a belief that programming is an integral part of a library's effort to mobilize resources in response to specific needs of its community. Evaluation is

dependent on the type of attitude of the library. Beyond the affect of attitude is Rayward's opinion that there is no cookie-cutter approach to evaluation, each evaluation must fit its situation exactly to be useful. Evaluation has uncertainties and difficulties, particularly over its intended purpose. There are technical difficulties in creating any successful evaluation. Finally the complex and multi-layered character of library goals, layered again with the complex purposes of arts programming creates many problems in adequately evaluating a program. He is adamant that head counts tell you next to nothing and the goal is to test the programs against the needs of the user group and library and continually improve the programs. Outside of these difficulties, Rayward eloquently argues for the necessity of evaluation. He fears that without it programming can be misplaced or misused. Evaluation has the dual purpose of making you think about the community needs, library needs and program requirements and find balance.

Susan Brandehoff (1997) writes about what she believes the changing role of public libraries should be in the opinion piece "Turning Libraries into Cultural Centers" from American Libraries. Brandehoff, as a project manager of American library Association Public Programs Office, believes that cultural programs add to the "productive life" of the public library's user community. It is difficult but important for the public library to encourage the individual or society to engage with topics such as the creative process, ethics, history or art. In her position within ALA Public Programs, Brandehoff believes that the climate for cultural programming is improving with more commitment from librarians, increased financial support from local businesses and organizations and increased local media support. Attendance, circulation and demand are also on the increase for public libraries offering cultural programming. Another benefit is

the ways cultural programs can be used to help the community work together and increase the “recognition factor” and support for the public library. She supports the pre-packaged programs offered through ALA. Unfortunately there is no definition of cultural programming given by Brandehoff.

Nancy Milnor Smith (1997) in another opinion piece argues that the public library should actively promote arts programming, based on her opinion that the public library is uniquely positioned as an educational institution to work with public trust and meet the needs of the community where the public education system has failed. Smith includes a vital topic of controversy; the position of technology within the public library and its impact on arts programming. She believes that the focus on the technology controversy has shaken the profession’s understanding of the mission and future of the public library. The rapidity of change and the fear of expense associated with the new technologies have created a “technology treadmill” that has cost the public library field the broad perspective crucial for success. Smith argues that public libraries should take advantage of their strength in the variety of their resources and become a cultural leader. Vigorous programming, creating alliances with artists and art organizations, networking within the profession and focusing on multiculturalism are the ways Smith believes public libraries can position themselves as a cultural leader. However, the article gives no clear definition of arts programming or cultural leadership.

In conclusion a review of the literature shows that information on the topic within the field is scarce and is spread out over the past twenty-five years. There are many inconsistencies. What is available is often opinion and there is a lack of empirical research. Yet, as Johnson show, and Brandehoff and Smith suggest, public libraries are

engaging in and using arts programming to create a new role for libraries as cultural centers. Davies and Hayden both describe the thinking behind those against libraries involving themselves in art programs; it will take away from the readers, be expensive and difficult to maintain. The methods behind production, selection and evaluation are also key topics within the literature review.



## Methodology

The qualitative interview as described in Qualitative Evaluation and Research methods by Michael Quinn Patton (1990) and Grant McCracken's (1988) description of the long interview in The Long Interview were used to design the methodology. Here, the purpose of this method is to explore individual perspectives and opinions on the relationship of arts programming to public library goals.

This method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual to see the context and pattern of daily experience. (Patton, 1990, p. 9)

The research data was collected by interviewing four librarians who hold positions of responsibility for arts programming in a public library. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into how public libraries select and present arts programming, its centrality to the library's mission, and methods of collaboration and evaluation. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded and transcribed. Four main themes with a total of eighteen questions made up the interview (see Appendix A).

An initial request to participate in the interview was mailed to thirty-eight possible study participants with the consent form (see Appendix B). Possible participants were picked from a list of public libraries in North Carolina; mailings were sent primarily to counties not more than six hours drive away. Four responded positively and appointments were established to conduct the interviews at their public library. Maintaining their privacy was a condition of consent and, consequently names, location or titles will be used. The four interviews will be known as Interview A, Interview B, Interview C and Interview D. Seven public libraries responded but declined to be

interviewed for lack of arts programming. One librarian failed to keep the interview appointment and subsequent attempts to reschedule failed. Thirty public libraries did not respond at all.

I designed a questionnaire of eighteen open-ended questions concerning their view of arts programming in their public library and I used a menu to direct the conversation (See Appendix C). The interviews were loosely structured and while all eighteen questions were asked of each individual it was intended to be more of a conversation than a traditional interview. The librarians had the option to not answer a question for any reason, no one did so. The interviews averaged forty-three minutes in length. After transcription the interviews were broken down into themes and compared for areas of agreement and disagreement. The areas of overlap and disagreement found within the interviews make up the observations of this research study.

## Observations

The goal of the qualitative interview is to find the patterns and logic behind the daily experience of the individual. A description of each interview follows, tracing the real world experience and perspective of the public librarians involved in arts programming. I then intend to use the four interviews as a group and trace the more general patterns that make up the experience of the North Carolina public library.

Interview A is a para-librarian, who has worked at the same regional public library for all twenty-five years. She is in charge of outreach and volunteer services. The library serves a population base of approximately 56,000 with a staff of two professional librarians and 11 para-librarians. When asked about the service communities she described them as “suburban, well educated with a high level of literacy and basically middle-class.” Her long established relationship with the Friends of the Library group and other volunteer structures was the reason she believes she was promoted seven years ago to manager of outreach services. A particular focus of her work is offering services to senior citizens and homebound clients. Her work takes her to the branches of the regional library approximately two days out of the week. She states a strong feeling of connection with each library’s community of users.

There is no definition of arts programming at use in the library, no policy statement in support of general programming or arts programming and no budget funds clearly delineated for programming. The most common source of funds is from the Friends of the Library. A representative type of programming is the lunch hour craft series in which local artists present a one-hour discussion/teaching group. All examples of programming described by Interview A included a leader or expert showing an

interested audience how to do or create the topic. Her favorite was last summer's month long needlework series. The programs also tend to be interactive and engage the audience to create with the leader.

They had a print collection for years that was destroyed because of damage and as part of a weeding project for an approaching move to a larger facility expected in the next six months. She does not believe they intend to rebuild the collection. The library is quite old and the lack of space for gathering people or exhibiting clearly hinders many types of arts programming. Children's art programming is more abundant with a very popular puppet theatre weekly event. The children's librarian has personal enthusiasm for events and tries to have a program, craft or story hour everyday. Senior citizens are another significant audience, but they do not like to target groups. Interview A said explicitly, "We don't try to hone in on a group, we try to be convenient so as many people as possible can come in." The word convenience/convenient was used repeatedly. Convenience was the favored method by which the library felt it could entice or keep users.

Regarding programs, there is no selection process for topics or objects, no method of evaluation beyond a head count, and the presentation of information is not designed. There is a strong collaboration, however, with financial support coming from the Friends of the Library group and local artists or experts willing to lead a program. "We like to bring in older folks, folks who want to share their experiences. We had one gentleman who would get the group real involved. He was a retired Army instructor and would talk about Shakespeare. He would have people write their own sonnets and they would talk about poetry. He was a big hit." Interview A thinks the majority of artist/experts have

been involved in the library for years, or are members of the Friends group and are the main source for ideas for the arts programs. I would argue that the atmosphere and impression Interview A and her library gave to the topic of arts program was a passive one. Arts programming is clearly not a primary concern.

Interview B also has been working at the same library for over twenty years, and works in a regional public library. Public Library B documents a service population of about 40,000. Interview B argues this is misleading. Due to geography the library many residents of three other counties find their location more convenient than their own county libraries. The geography tends to spread people out and the county can be best described as rural. Also the popularity of the town as a place of summer homes adds significantly more people who use the library adds a large seasonal difference. Interview B's public library is new and was designed for gatherings and also has a display wall for holding exhibits. When I visited there were three exhibits on the wall; one of a local photography, another for children on general collecting, and a display by the local historical society on Confederate uniforms. Interview B's library has a very full schedule of programming and the majority of the programs are art oriented in nature. Like Interview A, the arts programs tend to be interactive and very hands on. They do not have a clearly defined definition of arts programming, nor is there a policy statement in support of arts programming. There is a yearly budget allocation to programming, though not specifically designated to arts programming. Interview B has a number of job titles and many responsibilities at her library and repeatedly discussed their urgent need for at least someone part-time to help manage the programming. One of her duties is to send out a survey by mail throughout the community every six months to find out what

types of programs users would like to have presented. “The surveys are real general and just take a minute to fill out. If you make it longer people won’t bother with them, so you have to be careful to make them short.”

She relies heavily on local artists, teachers and speakers to lead or volunteer with the programs. Interview B’s many years as a resident are the basis of her belief that she is very aware of and responsive to their user community. The length of time she has been part of the library also, to her mind, helps to foster the local collaboration with artists, teachers and volunteers the library depends on to create arts programming. There is a university, and strong art council presence in the community, and she believes that helps support arts programming.

In the nine years Interview B has been in charge of arts programming she has noticed a strong increase in the demand for programming. The summer is a time of particular increase because of large presence of older people with summer homes in the area and school-aged children. They have had particular success combining arts programs with fundraising during the summer months. “The summer people use our library heavily. And what with being on vacation and all, they keep the suggestion box stuffed. We can barely keep up.” A recent example is a combination book sale and book-making workshop held during an annual town-wide festival. Outside funding comes from the Friends of the Library Group and, occasionally, through a grant from the regional art council. The last art council grant was used to have a summer long combination of events around poetry including a contest, a reading series from a respected poet and many creative writing workshops. However, this year they did not try for the grant because no one felt they had enough time to devote to it.

Outside of those programs specifically for children there was no attempt to target a specific audience with arts programming. There is no evaluation strategy beyond a headcount. The public and the interests of those collaborating with the library choose topics based on the survey response. Interview B feels that the library must support what the volunteers or program leaders are doing and not dictate the topic or approach to them because the library depends on their goodwill.

I found the most striking theme of Interview's B daily experience to be the need to use everything to the library's best advantage. Programs are combined to fit two or more needs of the community and the library. An arts program on regional music also makes use of the exhibit space to allow the local genealogy society to display local art objects. This in turn allows the library to include information on their genealogy and local history resources. Advertisement of arts programs is heavily pushed for its help in getting people to the program but also into the library. Everyone working at the library had combined job titles. No opportunity or resource is wasted. On the negative side, the librarians feel overextended and in a constant struggle to find more time.

Collaboration is an important component in the arts programming but it is not as it has been commonly described in the literature. Collaboration for Interview B is focused on local resources; she had no interest in going beyond the boundaries of her state. For larger or more complex needs of the community she felt the library was not responsible, instead they should direct that need to the specialists like the university or the museum. In conclusion, Interview B felt strongly that the public library should provide arts programming but that the library filled a local niche, for more than that the user should turn to other cultural institutions.

The head librarian of the largest public library and a seventeen-year veteran, is Interview C. The library serves a population of 101,000 and is in a urban area of the state. Due to the nature of his job as the administrative head of the library with twenty-three on staff, he did not really have a sense of what happened on the floor of the library from day to day. However, he said he took a special interest in arts programming and so had agreed to the interview. "I started out as a musician and ended up a librarian but I see no reason I can't combine the two. You see, I bring expertise about music to this library and we use programs to make use of my expertise."

Unlike the other libraries, programming in this public library was part of the yearly budget and a certain percentage of funds were given over directly to arts programming. Arts programming was more structured here, with an employee in charge of specific areas of the program. No one person ran programming but all were responsible for a part. He gave the example of a recent workshop on classical music appreciation presented to eleven clients. He presented the workshop that was part lecture, part discussion and part listening to important works of classical music. The reference desk was responsible for working out a bibliography and having resources available to supplement the workshop. The public service department designed advertisement and mailings. A member of the Friends group joined the workshop and brought refreshments. It was his favorite program and he had been presenting it for about seven years. "I think it adds value to our library, to our presence in the community. The programs help people get comfortable and gain confidence to use the library's resources."

The librarians on his staff were currently investigating the possibilities of using an ALA sponsored exhibits or pre-packaged programs as he was very impressed by the



recent exhibit on Duke Ellington. The library made a strong effort to collaborate with local writers, but Interview C did not like to use library space as a gallery for local artists, the result of having had a bad experience in the past. The schedule for the programming showed a pattern of one arts program for adults per week. Interview C said this was intentional and helped them fund and manage the arts programs. It is certainly true that this was the only library in which scarcity of resources did not seem to hinder programming. However, it also seemed formal and a little stale, with the same programs being recycled year after year. Interview C interspersed the interview with mini-lectures on the importance of arts programming. His main theme is that arts programming allowed a public library to expose its clients to new information and resources. This exposure was through traditional styles of teaching, with no real concern for different learning theories.

The final interview is from a library assistant of eleven years at a branch library under Interview's A regional library. This was the smallest public library I visited, in a rural setting with a population served of about 10,000 people. The bulk of the arts programming offered at this small library were for children with only occasional adult programming offered. Interview D stated frankly that lack of staff time as well as money made the arts programs a low priority. What is offered tends to be simple, without many thrills, and interactive in nature such as crafts. "We just can't get to fussy. We have to keep it simple, like making kites or whatever. One time we tried to do papier-mâché, and what a mess the kids made. It took us weeks to get back to normal."

Scarcity of resources is compounded by lack of room. Interview D repeated over and over that they had outgrown the building. Volunteers or outside experts lead the

programs infrequently; usually it is the librarians themselves. It is not clear if that is due to the spotty nature of the arts programming or because no one had been able to create collaborative relationships with outside sources.

There is no budget for arts programming and no policy statement in place. Outside funding is not often available and the Friends of the Library group are not very active in the community. There is no evaluation of any kind for programming. There is no method by which topics are chosen. There is a strong belief that the library's primary objective is to meet the information needs of the community's readers and Interview D felt they were doing a good job. "We don't have the computers or the meeting rooms like in the new libraries, but we still have books and a dedicated staff, so I think we do a good job at the end of the day." Interview D hopes that one-day they will be able to offer a more balanced arts program but believes that such programs are secondary to pushing books.

The last interview I conducted was a point of strong contrast with the three others. Scarcity forced a streamlined approach to meeting the needs of the community, and arts programming was one of the first things to be eliminated. Interview D seemed disappointed with the state of her library's arts programming but also had a list of needs such as improved pay, new computers and a better air conditioner; these precede thinking of devoting any extra funds to arts programming.

Each of the four interviews had a flavor or feel to it and represented an approach and experience with arts programming in the public library setting. The points they share in common seem often to be at odds with the theory and debate documented in the

literature review. Common experiences and general themes are the foci of the second half of our analysis. A large shared theme is how directly the availability of resources affects arts programming. Too little money, staff, time or room cripples arts programming. The interviews bear out the idea that arts programming is dependent on the local situation and only in a time of plenty can flourish.

Another common pattern is the length of time each librarian interviewed had spent at that library. The shortest stretch is eleven years and two have spent longer than twenty years at the same library. At some point in the interview each librarian made claims to a special knowledge of or connection to their user community based on the length of time they had been a member of that community. Lack of evaluation might be connected to this sense of special knowledge.

I found that few public libraries provide arts programming without a complex intermingling of purposes. Needs of the community, the public library and the individual user are combined. Public librarians exploit arts programs so that one program might meet an information need within their community, help raise support and awareness of the library, develop contacts with other professionals in cultural institutions and provide an inter-generational forum for their patrons. Mutations like this are endless.

Another general pattern I found supports the idea of arts programming as being permeable. Collaboration is a major theme within the literature and the interviews. In the literature, collaboration is described as having two levels. The first level is collaboration as fundraising and, as the Cultural Program Report documents, the most common form of public library support is through the Friends of the Library groups. This is supported by the experience of three of the four librarians interviewed. The second

level, according to the field's professional literature, is a form of professional networking. Public libraries are encouraged to turn to other, and it is implied higher, cultural institutions such as a museum or the ALA Public Programs Office. This sort of networking on a professional level did not occur in any of the interviews; rather collaboration was local in scope. It was to local artists, local teacher, arts councils and societies the librarians collaborated with to form and support arts programming. The health of the relationship between the public library and this local support network was shown to be important to the librarians interviewed and they made efforts to foster it.

There is a sense of dependency on the goodwill of volunteers. As Interview B states, "We are lucky to have a college in town, and an active arts council, we depend on those people to come through for us time and again." Another way to identify the importance of this general pattern is through the hole it leaves in its absence, as is the case with Interview D. Her interview documents a lack of connection with outside agencies or people leaving arts programming for when the staff can get around to it. The lack of support and activity of the Friends of the Library group was described as a "crime" three times in the interview. Interview's D library was not instigating collaboration as the others were and its arts programming was paltry in comparison.

Notably, evaluation is not present in any of the real-world experiences. Two librarians use head count as a rough reading of the popularity of that particular program. No one I interviewed compiled or used the head counts or any type of evaluation method to use to support arts programming. None of those interviewed seemed worried about the lack of evaluation.

The inability of any of the librarians interviewed to define what makes an arts program is the starting point for two general patterns. The first pattern is the impact on arts programming by the lack of definition and the lack of a developed policy statement. Arts programming is not anchored by a common definition or the policy structures that guides the library's operations. It is, therefore, not necessarily communicable or understood in the same way by everyone. Being open to personal interpretations is the cause for the uneven and diverse arts programs described through the interviews.

Each library had a flavor or an atmosphere around their arts programs, much of it personality driven. I believe one of the strongest patterns shown through the qualitative interview is how much the individual librarian's personality, interests and enthusiasm impact the strength and health of the library's arts program. The question of what each individual thought about the purpose of arts program using the Rayward's scale was not directly asked yet each individual's position is clear.

The second pattern shown by the lack of definition that I found was the porous nature of arts programming. There is fluidity in content and presentation noticeable within each interview. Arts programs fill a variety of roles as seen most clearly in Interview B but appears in the three other interviews as well. Arts programs are combined in endless variation to other goals and needs of the public libraries. The boundaries blur so a concrete definition is difficult to establish.

A common pattern of everyday experience found embedded within each interview is the interactive character of the arts programs. Each interview included the idea that arts program should have a "hands on" aspect. Reasons given for this characteristic included the ideas that arts programs should be fun, engaging and not like a classroom.

Socializing was described as an important element for successful arts programs in three interviews. The interactive character of arts programming also places meaning within the creative process and not solely in the object as it would be in a museum. The pattern discovered placed engagement above content for arts programming.

The final common pattern is connected to the presentation of arts programming. The literature highlights the way arts programming can be used to include new users, different learning styles or to attract people who do not normally use the resources of a library. None of the four librarians interviewed seemed aware of the display or presentation issues of arts programming. In fact few were even concerned with the selection process of topics. Outside agencies or people commonly picked their topics without reference to the user community or the librarian in charge. How the information of arts programming was presented was simply not an area of concern.

## Conclusion

The qualitative interview as a methodology is designed to build perspectives. Conclusive results are not possible given the style of research. What is gained here is a view of how public librarians are involved in arts programming from day to day and what it means to the library. Patterns emerge showing arts programs to be permeable and fluid in nature combining many roles and goals within a single event. Evaluation and presentation are non-issues. Collaboration can be characterized as local in scope and a fundamental need for a strong arts program. The inability of any of the interviewees to define arts programming leads me to believe that its form is shaped to fit particular needs. Without the structure given by a policy statement or definition addressing arts programs such programs are open to individual interpretation and strongly impacted by personality and personal enthusiasm. Each interview showed a different reality between the real world of the public library and different ways the library and the librarian respond to that reality, and the larger perspective on arts programming observed in the literature.

A major limitation of the study is the small number of public libraries observed. Judgment is not possible with such a small base but I believe the patterns found may indicate areas that could improve the arts programming efforts throughout the library community. I would like to expand on three such patterns.

The first issue focuses on the implications of establishing a definition for arts programming. A definition becomes important in the context of a mission statement because it enables the governing body to acknowledge and support arts programming. It can help to create a shared vision of the role of the library and the goals behind arts programming for staff, governing bodies, volunteers and others. It can provide a basis

for alliances with outside agencies such as schools, museums or community groups. An established definition is an important tool for effective communication.

The possible benefits evaluation might bring to arts programming are another issue. Serious evaluation may help the library to identify its audience and more effectively seek out funding. I believe evaluation would allow the library to offer new types of programs. Finally, serious evaluation would build confidence and help librarians identify themselves as important providers of cultural experiences. In my opinion, evaluation is a necessary component to a successful arts program.

The study focused on public libraries in North Carolina. An agency that combines efforts might improve arts programming for the state as a whole. The differences between the four public libraries were very large. A statewide policy focused on arts programming might minimize these differences and give the public a better, more consistent idea of what libraries offer. Finally, if the state of North Carolina is interested in building its libraries as centers for cultural heritage, perhaps a statewide office at the capital is worth investing with the responsibility to coordinate and assist in the building of programs of this kind. I believe such an effort would benefit the public libraries, the library profession and the public using the libraries.



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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

Name:

Job title:

Level of education:

How long have you been a librarian?

How long have you been a librarian at your current library?

The questions below are guidelines of the topics I wish to cover in our interview. The interview is intended to ‘flesh out’ topics related to arts programming and so I encourage you to use examples from your experience and to spend as much time as needed with each question. Most of all I hope you enjoy telling me your unique perspective.

- I. Definitions/ General Information
  - a. What would you define as arts programming?
  - b. What is your involvement in arts programming?
  - c. Would you please describe a typical example of arts programming in your library.
- II. Centrality of arts programming to mission/ importance to community
  - a. What about arts programming appeals to you? What is your opinion of the arts programming at your library?
  - b. How long has your library been providing arts programming? From your perspective how has it changed? What would you like to see happen next?
  - c. Who is your audience? What has been your opinion of the effect of the arts programming on the library’s community?
  - d. Does your library have a policy statement/mission statement about arts programming? What is your opinion of that statement? Does your library budget for arts programming? Are there other methods of funding?
  - e. What is your opinion about the purpose of arts programming?
  - f. What is your opinion of the value of arts programming?
- III. Selection Process/Presentation
  - a. How are topics/subject matter chosen? What issues are you most concerned with when selecting a program?
  - b. How is art chosen? How is it treated? Are there methods of presentation commonly used? Could you describe some?
  - c. What do you think are important issues for selecting an arts program? What are important issues for presenting?

IV. Collaboration/Evaluation

- a. Who is involved in arts programming?
- b. Are there people outside of the library involved? What roles do they play?
- c. Does your library evaluate its arts programs? What have you learned through evaluation?

V. Extension Questions

- a. What has been your favorite arts program?
- b. What are some of the difficulties you have faced in developing and presenting arts programs?
- c. Are there any other examples or information you would like to share?

Thank you for helping me develop my thesis. If you have any questions, comments or concern please feel free to contact me( Bethany Ronnberg at 336/376-1806 or bler7@hotmail.com).

## Appendix B

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Program Staff Member,

I am writing to ask you to participate in a study that will examine the role of arts programming in public libraries. You are being asked to participate because you are a professional working in the public library setting. With the growth in the number, variety and demand for arts programming occurring in public libraries, I am interested in how public libraries use arts programming to support their institutional missions. This study will be used as part of my master's paper to complete my M.L.S. from the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I am asking you or another full-time Adult Services/Programs staff member in your library to donate approximately an hour of your time to interview with me about arts programming in public libraries. All efforts will be made to make the interview convenient for your schedule for the month of March. I feel that interviews will allow me to fully explore this current issue and your decision to help me is greatly appreciated. 4 to 8 librarians will be interviewed for the study.

This study is being carried out with the support of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and has received approval by its Institutional Review Board. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question you choose. At any time during this study you may contact the UNC-CH Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board if you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject (AA-IRB Office, CB# 4100, 201 Bynum Hall, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, 919/962-7761, [aaa-irb@unc.edu](mailto:aaa-irb@unc.edu)). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. David Carr, should you choose (919/962-8364, [carr@ils.unc.edu](mailto:carr@ils.unc.edu)).

All information you provide will remain strictly confidential. No one will be identified in any report or publication of this study or its results. You may also indicate if you wish to receive a summary of my findings when the study is completed.

If you have any question concerning this study, I encourage you to contact me (336/376-1806 or [bler7@hotmail.com](mailto:bler7@hotmail.com)). Please use the envelope provided to mail back one copy of the consent form and a way to contact you to set up the interview. The second copy of the consent form is for you to keep. Thank you in advance for your consideration of the project.

Sincerely,

Bethany Ronnberg  
School of Library and Information Science  
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

I have read the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_____	_____
Signature of Research Subject	Date

_____	_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

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I have read the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_____	_____
Signature of Research Subject	Date

_____	_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

Contact information

Name and Title:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

## Appendix C

### Public Libraries and Arts Programming Topics for our conversation

- Your engagement in Arts Programming
  
- Arts Programming and the Community
  
- Arts Content and the Library
  
- Working with Others
  
- Challenges and Satisfactions

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